

Application No. 10/708,500
Amendment dated December 30, 2005
Reply to Office Action of October 3, 2005

REMARKS

This amendment is submitted with a Request for Continued Examination under 37 C.F.R. §1.114 in response to the final Office Action mailed October 3, 2005. Claims 1-14 remain pending in the application prior to this amendment. Claims 1-6 and 8-11 stand rejected. Claim 7 was objected to for depending from a rejected base claim, and claims 12-14 were withdrawn in view of a restriction requirement. Claims 1, 7 and 11 have been amended herein, and claims 12-14 have been canceled without prejudice. Applicants assert that the amended claims are in complete condition for allowance and respectfully request reconsideration in view of the following remarks.

Claims Rejected Under 35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 1, 4-6, 8, 9 and 11 stand rejected Under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,952,630 to Filion et al. Claims 1 and 11 are the only independent claims of this rejected group. While Applicants believe that the rejections of claims 1 and 11 are improper for at least the reasons set forth in the response filed September 20, 2005, claims 1 and 11 have now been amended to more clearly distinguish these claims over the Examiner's interpretation of Filion '630. Specifically, claims 1 and 11 have been amended to recite:

a substrate member adapted to support the trim component within the interior of an automobile, said substrate member having a first side and a second side, and having at least one target area for providing a soft feel to the trim component, said substrate member having a first thickness outside said target area such that said substrate member is not pliable outside said target area, and a second thickness within said target area that is reduced relative to said first thickness such that said substrate member is pliable in said

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target area.

Applicants assert that these amendments to claims 1 and 11 overcome the Examiner's interpretation of Filion '630 because Filion '630 does not teach or suggest each and every element recited in claims 1 and 11. Specifically, Filion '630 does not teach or suggest a substrate member adapted to support an automotive interior trim component within the interior of an automobile and having a first thickness outside a target area such that the substrate is not pliable outside the target area, and a second thickness within the target area that is reduced relative to the first thickness such that the substrate is pliable in the target area, as required by claims 1 and 11. Rather, the substrate 22, 22a, 22b of Filion '630 has a uniform thickness throughout, and there is no teaching or suggestion to modify the substrate to have a target area with a reduced thickness such that the substrate is pliable within the target area, and not pliable outside the target area.

In rejecting claims 1 and 11, the Examiner refers to outer surface 18, which includes a flexible skin 26 and a transparent protective coating 43. This outer surface is merely a cover material for the armrest of Filion '630 and is not a substrate that is adapted to support the armrest within the interior of an automobile. Rather, Filion '630 states that "[a] substrate is employed on the back side of the foam to support the form and the outer cover and for mounting the soft interior trim panel in a vehicle." (Filion '630 at col. 1, lines 19-22.) In the various embodiments disclosed therein, Filion '630 refers to the substrate as elements 22, 22a, 22b and not the flexible skin 26 of outer surface 18. Moreover, despite the fact that flexible skin 26 may have areas of varying

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thickness, the flexible skin 26 remains pliable in the thick portions (see, e.g., Fillion '630 at col. 2, lines 43-49 and FIG. 1), in contrast to the substrate member recited in claims 1 and 11, which is not pliable outside the target area. For at least these reasons, Applicants assert that claims 1 and 11 are not taught or suggested by Fillion '630 and Applicants respectfully request that the rejections of claims 1 and 11 be withdrawn.

Claims 4-6, 8 and 9 each depend from independent claim 1 and are therefore in condition for allowance for at least the reasons stated above for claim 1. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the rejections of claims 4-6, 8 and 9 over Fillion '630 be withdrawn.

Claims Rejected Under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 2, 3, 9 and 10 stand rejected Under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Fillion '630, either alone or in combination with U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0125734 to Pokorzynski et al. Claims 2, 3, 9 and 10 each depend from independent claim 1 and are in condition for allowance for at least the reasons stated above for claim 1. Specifically, Fillion '630 does not teach or suggest a substrate member adapted to support a trim component within the interior of an automobile and having a first thickness outside a target area such that the substrate member is not pliable outside the target area, and a second thickness within a target area that is reduced relative to the first thickness such that the substrate is pliable in the target area, as discussed above. Pokorzynski '734 does not teach or suggest a modification of Fillion '630 that would result in the invention recited in claim 2. For at least these reasons, Applicants respectfully request that the rejections of claims 2, 3, 9

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and 10 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) be withdrawn.

Allowable Subject Matter

Claim 7 was objected to for depending from a rejected base claim, but was indicated to be allowable if rewritten in independent form. Claim 7 has now been rewritten in independent form, and Applicants respectfully request that the objection to claim 7 be withdrawn.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing amendments to the claims and the remarks set forth herein, Applicants believe this case is in condition for allowance and respectfully request allowance of the pending claims. If the Examiner believes any issue requires further discussion, the Examiner is respectfully asked to telephone the undersigned attorney so that the matter may be promptly resolved. The Examiner's prompt attention to this matter is appreciated.

Applicants are of the opinion that a fee of \$790.00 is due in connection with the Request for Continued Examination filed on even date herewith. Please charge Deposit Account No. 23-3000 in this amount. If any additional charges or credits are necessary to complete this communication, please apply them to Deposit Account No. 23-3000.

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Respectfully submitted,

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